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A service of the Child Care Bureau

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A FRAMEWORK FOR REVIEWING EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES

Organize the Review

Identify key components of interest to the group, including the four areas identified in the *Good Start, Grow Smart* initiative. The guidelines should:

1) Address ages 3-5;
2) Align with State K-12 standards;
3) Focus on language, literacy, and numeracy; and
4) Apply to a variety of care settings.

Search for Key Information

Many guidelines have an *Introduction*, *Background*, or *Overview* section that describes several aspects of the State's efforts, including its intent in developing guidelines, who led the effort and worked on the guidelines, what research or other resources were referred to, what ages and settings the guidelines apply to, whether they explicitly align with State K-12 standards, the approach to including children with special needs, and the consideration of language and cultural diversity.

A review of the body of text of the guidelines or the appendices may turn up useful information. Some guidelines' documents have companion pieces, including parent or teacher guides that may be appropriate for review. Often the State Web site or contact person can be helpful in locating specific information.

Focus on the Guidelines

The review of guidelines will focus primarily on the actual guidelines, benchmarks, and examples provided in the States' documents. Questions to ask include:

- Is the format easy to follow?
- Do the guidelines include easy-to-understand benchmarks and examples?
- Is the language understandable across a range of early care and education providers?
- Do the examples reflect children's and adults' interactions in center-based, family child care, and home settings?
- Are the specific guidelines within a domain based on the latest, most rigorous research?

Key Features of Early Learning Guidelines

Most States review other guidelines and resources when developing or revising their early learning guidelines. This document identifies examples of a variety of characteristics of early learning guidelines. These are examples, <u>not best practices</u>, and are meant to serve only as a way to look at specific features of early learning guidelines to get ideas about how to make a State's guidelines most useful and effective for the children and providers in the State.

A list of State early learning guidelines is available on the Web at http://nccic.org/pubs/goodstart/elgwebsites.html.

Wyoming

➕ Clearly delineated guidelines, benchmarks, and examples.

Guidelines refer to what children need to know, understand, and be able to do within a specific developmental domain. Some alternative terms for guidelines are "Standards," "Expectations," and "Outcomes."

Benchmarks are descriptors that identify progress toward, or attainment of, knowledge and competencies in a particular domain. Benchmarks may also be known as "Indicators," "Building Blocks for Learning," or "Objectives."

Examples refer to observable behaviors of the skill or knowledge identified, often using language appropriate to a variety of care settings. Some alternative terms used are, "Steps for getting there," "Snapshot," and "Representative Examples."

Wyoming's guidelines use a format that allows the reader to understand the clear progression from the domain to the subset of skills, the standards, and the performance indicators.

➕ Examples apply to a variety of care settings.

The Snapshots indicate the behaviors expected of children within a variety of care settings. See particularly Snapshots 3 through 6, which could apply to any setting, including the home.

Performance Indicator #8 includes adaptations for English language learners.

➕ Language and literacy guidelines use strong research base.

These standards address the key skills and knowledge shown in the research to support emergent literacy. These are receptive and expressive vocabulary, phonological awareness, book knowledge and appreciation, print awareness and concepts, early writing, and alphabet knowledge. This set of standards covers the language and literacy areas comprehensively and sets high expectations for children and caregivers within an appropriate context.

Wyoming's *Early Childhood Readiness Standards* (September 2002) is available on the Web at http://www.k12.wy.us/eqa/nca/pubs/standards/earlychild.pdf.

Louisiana

- **Guiding principles are excerpted from Connecticut.**

  Louisiana received permission from Connecticut to use its guiding principles. If sections of another State's or national organization's guidelines are appropriate or useful for your State's guidelines, consider asking permission to use or adapt the section. Guiding principles, or other preamble or introductory sections, give caregivers and other key stakeholders an understanding of the State's vision for children, understanding of and beliefs about how children learn, and the role of families and providers in supporting early learning.

- **Adaptations for children with special needs included.**

  These are center-based standards that include adaptations for children with special needs. The placement and language of the adaptations illustrate how providers can make adaptations and indicate the importance of attending to children's special needs.

- **Provides links to multiple assessment tools.**

  Louisiana's guidelines identify how each performance indicator is linked to a variety of measures, including child outcomes, program standards, and national and State-developed assessment tools (Head Start, ECERS, etc.).

- **Approach to ages covered.**

  Louisiana chose to focus on developing guidelines for 4-year-old children, in part because the effort was led by the Department of Education and also because it wanted to focus on public pre-K. The next step is to develop guidelines for 3-year-old children; child care will take the lead, in partnership with the Department of Education, in developing these guidelines.

  Louisiana's *Standards for Programs Serving 4-Year-Old Children* (June 2002) is available on the Web at http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/assessment/standards/PDFs/PrekStandards6-02-02.pdf.

Colorado

- **Explicit reference to the early childhood foundation for each K-12 standard.**

  The guidelines are written in an easy-to-read narrative style and include developmentally appropriate information for each K-12 standard. The guidelines make a clear link between alignment of curriculum between early care and education and public school. These guidelines recognize that early learning standards are not an attempt to "push down" the expectations of school-age children but rather are meant to validate the learning that takes place in the preschool years.

  Colorado's *Building Blocks to Colorado's Content Standards* (April 2000) is available on the Web at http://www.cde.state.co.us/download/pdf/building_blocks4-26.pdf.

California

➕ **Profiles are available for children ages birth to 14 years.**

California's *Desired Results* represents a comprehensive system including program standards and a variety of training activities. The *Desired Results* system is just being phased in and its use is required of all programs or providers receiving public funds. The guidelines cover a broad age range. It is one of the few State set of standards that explicitly addresses the early learning needs of infant and toddlers.

California's *Desired Results for Children and Families* (July 2001) is available on the Web at http://www.cde.ca.gov/cyfsbranch/child_development/DR2.htm.

Indiana

➕ **Integrates the developmental needs of second language learners.**
➕ **References multiple domains within each standard.**

Indiana's guidelines explicitly identify how one developmentally appropriate activity or interaction (identified in these standards as a "Scenario") can be used to address multiple domains, including language and literacy, social-emotional development, cognitive skills, physical, self-help, and others. Further, the scenarios are applicable to a variety of care settings, including at home with parents. Some are also applicable to second-language learners.

Foundations for Young Children to the Indiana Academic Standards is available on the Web at http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/primetime/foundations.html.

Missouri

➕ **Companion handbooks for teachers and parents to facilitate implementation.**

Missouri chose to take one domain—literacy—and develop the guidelines and related implementation materials for parents and providers. The State has since developed guidelines in social-emotional development and science. Missouri began by developing guidelines and implementation materials in one domain; other States take a broader approach by developing guidelines in multiple domains and then creating implementation tools. These decisions are made based on available human and fiscal resources, as well as staff and consultant availability.

The parent handbook serves as a vehicle for providing parent information on child development and opportunities for involvement in the child's learning. The teacher guide gives some curriculum and program organization strategies to implement the guidelines. Both of these guides can be used as a sourcebook for more intensive training workshops or programs.

Missouri Pre-K Literacy Standards (Draft 2001) is available on the Web at http://www.dese.state.mo.us/divimprove/fedprog/earlychild/PreK_Standards.html.

PreK Standards

🔸 **Mathematics guidelines reflect latest research.**

These guidelines are an example of a resource developed by a national group in collaboration with CTB/McGraw-Hill. Included is a review of the most recent research on how young children learn mathematical concepts. In the "Vignettes," adjustments in materials and expectations appropriate for 3-year-olds, and 4- and 5-year olds are identified.

PreK Guidelines for Learning and Teaching (October 2002) is available on the Web at http://www.ctb.com/media/articles/pdfs/resources/PreKguidelines_summary.pdf.

The National Child Care Information Center does not endorse any organization, publication or resource.